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THE HOME
AT BETHANY



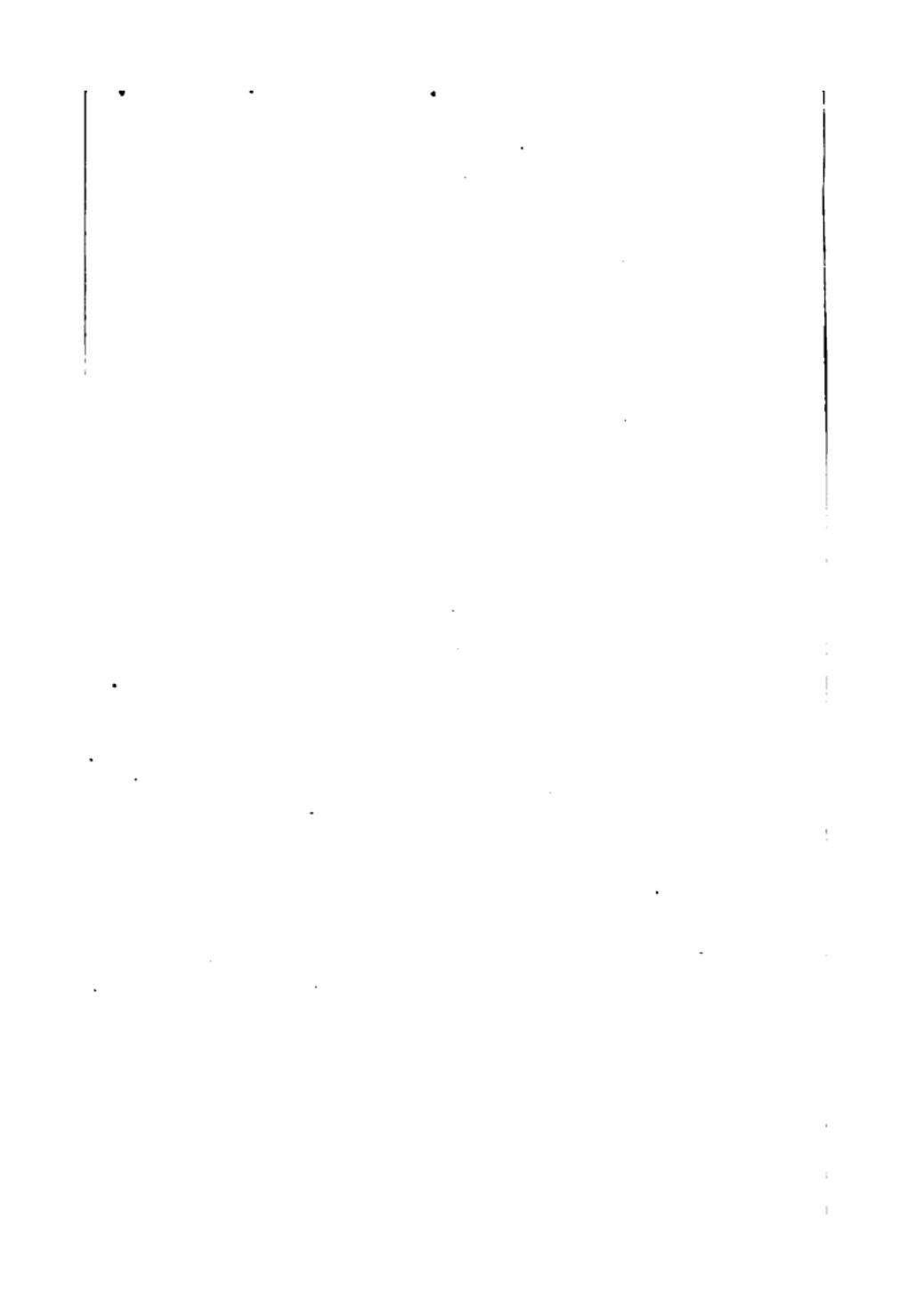
THE HOME
AT BETHANY

BY GEORGE EVERARD M. A.

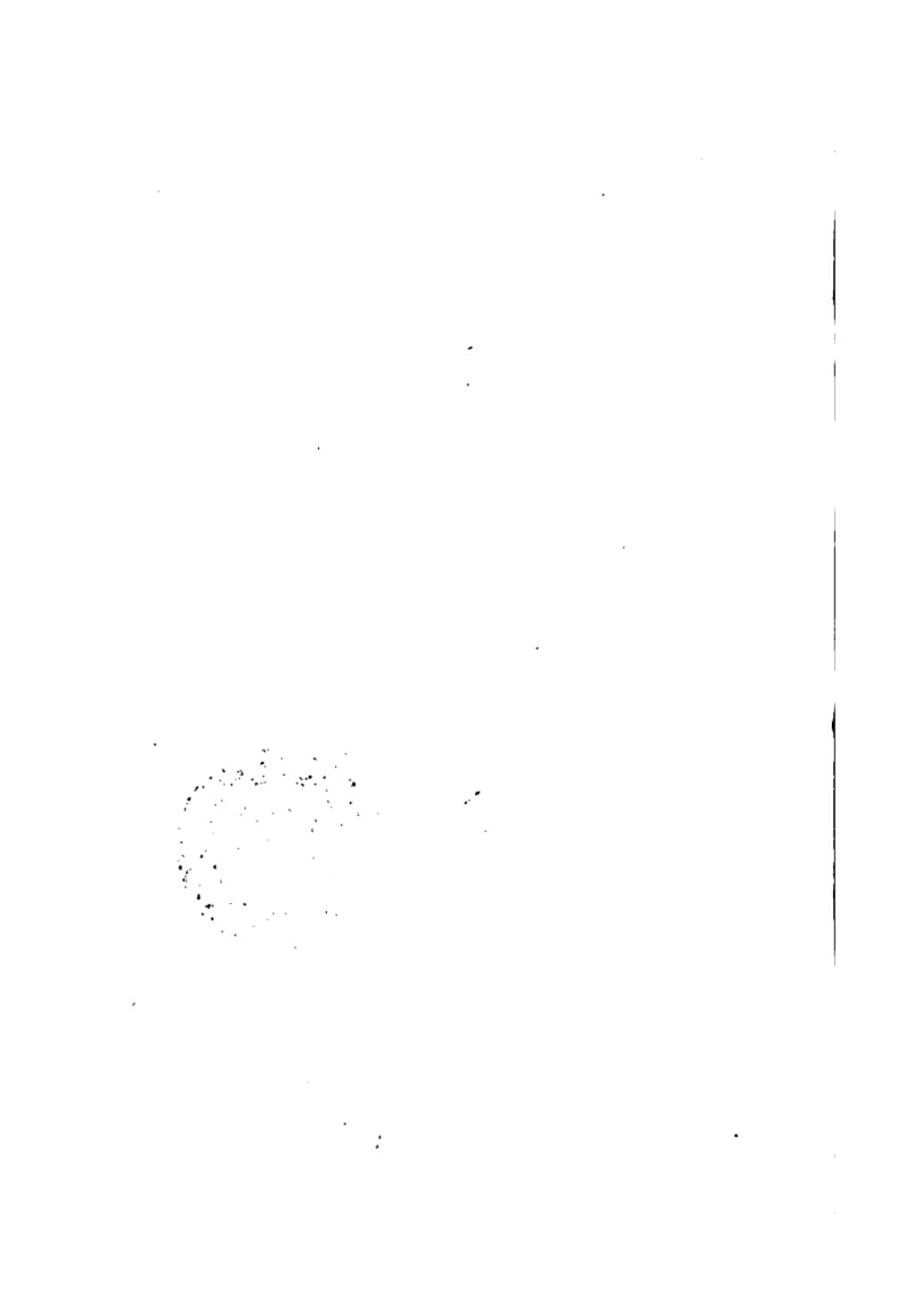
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The Home of Bethany.



THE HOME OF BETHANY;

OR,

Christ revealed as the Teacher and
Comforter of His People.

BY THE

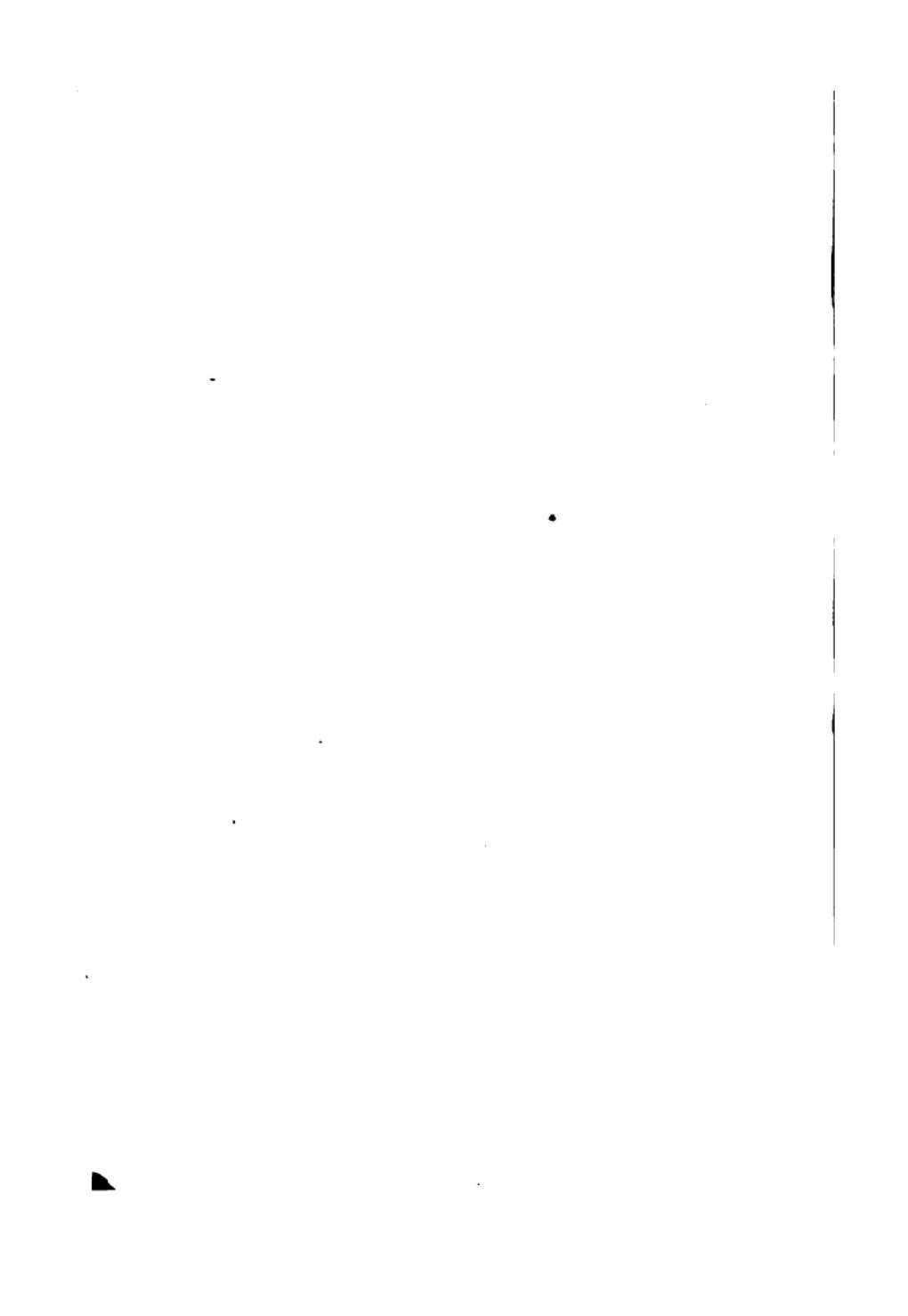
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AUTHOR OF "DAY BY DAY," "NOT YOUR OWN," ETC.



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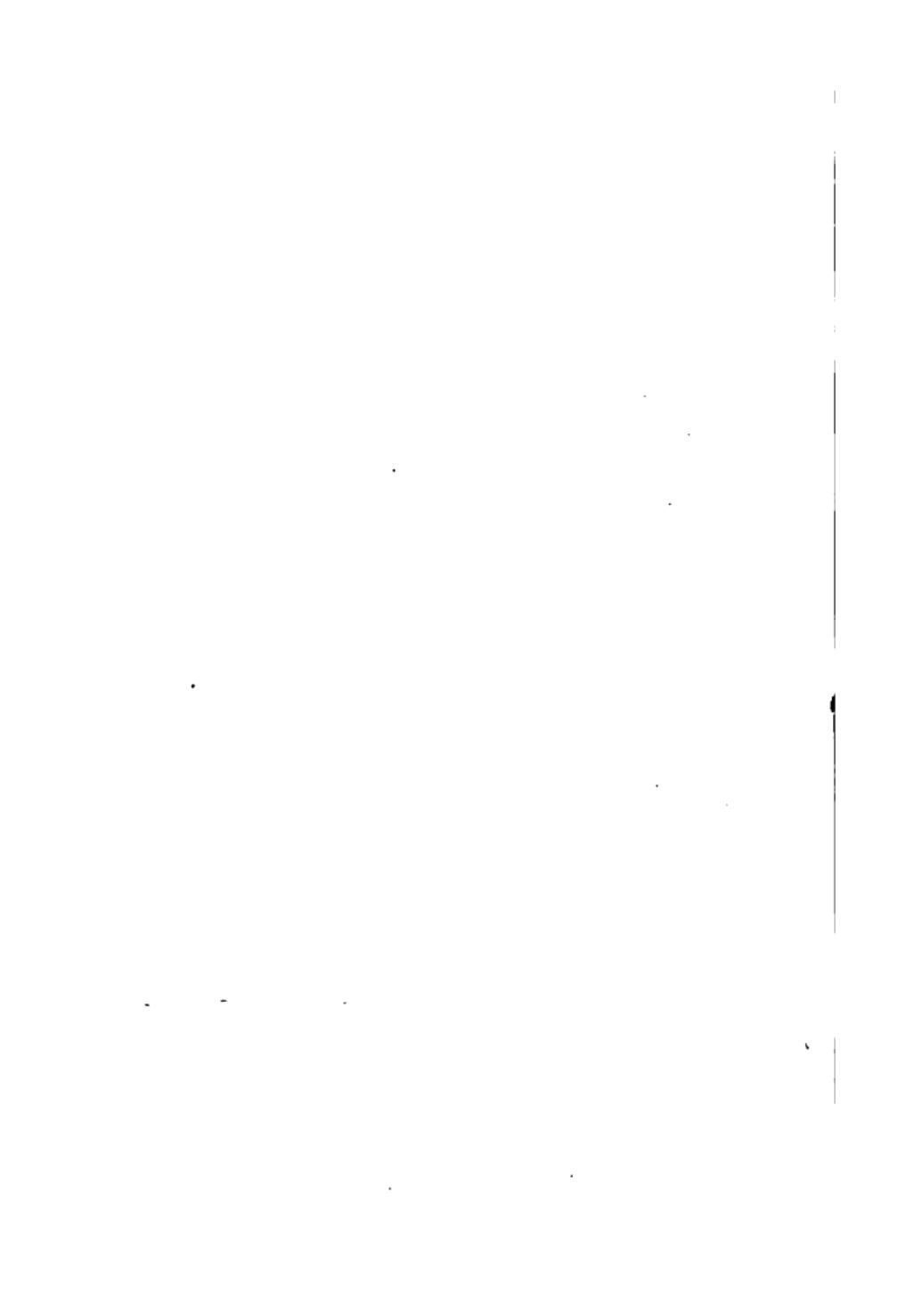
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The Home of Bethany.

I.

THE SISTERS.

HOLY SCRIPTURE is a tree of life, and every part of it, every branch, every twig, yea, every leaf, is full of healing virtue.

How true is this of the story of Bethany ! In itself it is a very Gospel of grace and love. To Christian hearts it has a peculiar charm. It tells of a family every member of which was dear to Jesus. It tells of a home where was found true, deep, genuine piety. We see the sisters when all was well with them. We see them again when a heavy burden of grief was crushing them to the

ground. We see the tender, loving Saviour with them as a willing Guest, sharing their hospitality, and speaking to them in words of heavenly wisdom. We see Him again with them as a Divine Comforter, fulfilling His office to heal the mourner and to bind up the broken-hearted.

If ever there was a home where the ark of God dwelt, it was in this home. Here Christ was honoured, and His word was received into meek and obedient hearts. A deep well-spring of love toward the Saviour dwelt in each breast, and in Christ's heart there was a well of love for Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.

Let us go in spirit and visit that home. Let us go and learn its precious lessons. Let us go and listen to the words of the sisters and the words of the Saviour. Let us discover, if we can, the secret of true peace in our ordinary every-day life, and the secret of hope and strength and consolation when sorrow befalls us. Would that in every

household to which this book may come, there might be felt something of the spirit that dwelt in the home of Bethany !

It has been remarked that the beloved Apostle gives a description of Bethany which is worthy of notice. If another writer had described it, he would probably have told something of its position,—of its being a suburb of Jerusalem where some of its wealthy inhabitants had their abode ; but John speaks of it, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, as “the town of Mary and her sister Martha.”

Ah, God values not a town or village for its beauty, for its salubrity, for its wealth ; but for those who dwell there in His fear and love. Doubtless many a spot, little esteemed amongst men, is dear to God, because His eye beholds there humble loving souls, to whom the name of the Redeemer is precious. It may be the quiet hamlet, far removed from busy mart and town ; it may be the street or the court where noise and smoke,

yea, and perhaps much poverty is found ; but our Father discerns there hearts touched by His Spirit, and amidst all their trials, the everlasting chimes of faith and prayer and thanksgiving are ever ascending thence to Him who never forgets His needy and sorrowful ones.

Our first introduction to the sisters is at a simple entertainment to which Martha had invited Christ (St. Luke x. 38—42) : “A certain woman named Martha received Him into her house.”

When Jesus came to a village in Samaria, we read in a previous chapter, they did not receive Him because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem. So these villagers refused Christ a lodging for a night, and lost all the blessing He would have brought to them. Had He abode with them, He would have spoken to them the words of life ; and, perhaps, as at Sychar, many might have heard and believed. But now the opportunity is lost, for He departs to another village. It is

otherwise with Zacchæus : when Christ calls to him, he opens his door and receives Him joyfully. No less joyfully did this godly woman welcome Christ into her home.

Dear reader, how do you act towards Jesus? Is it like the Samaritan villagers, or like Zacchæus and Martha? Do you shut the door against Christ, or do you gladly open it and ask Christ to enter in and dwell with you?

Too often the world knocks, and we say "Come in." Friends knock, and we admit them. The claims of business and of self-interest knock, and we readily hearken to them. The call of pleasure is heard and regarded. Sin comes in some deceitful guise, and we forbid her not. But Christ comes to bless, to help, to save,—to fill our poor aching hearts with such joy as earth knows not, and we say, "Stand aside! What have I to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth?" And so, with the bars and bolts of our sins and self-will and prejudice, we turn from our door

the best Friend. Shame on us for our ingratitude! This is He who gave His life-blood to redeem us! This is He who stooped from heaven to earth to lift us up to His Father's throne! Woe be to us if ever He depart from us! But great shall be our gain if only we will receive Him.

With Him enters peace, pardon, sonship, glory. "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."

O Jesu, Thou art standing
Outside the fast-closed door,
In lowly patience waiting
To pass the threshold o'er!
Shame on us, Christian brothers,
His name and sign who bear;
O shame, thrice shame upon us,
To keep Him standing there!

O Jesu, Thou art knocking!
And lo, that hand is scarred,
And thorns Thy brow encircle,
And tears Thy face have marred!

O love that passeth knowledge,
So patiently to wait ;
O sin that hath no equal,
So fast to bar the gate !

O Jesu, Thou art pleading
In accents meek and low,—
“I died for you my children,
And will you treat Me so ?”
O Lord, with shame and sorrow
We open now the door :
Dear Saviour, enter—enter—
And leave us never more !

When Jesus has entered the house, Mary chooses His footstool. She sits at His feet and hears His word. We read of two other of Christ's followers who chose a similar position. The woman that was a sinner stood at Christ's feet weeping for her sin, and waiting upon Him for the hope of pardoning mercy. The demoniac that was healed sat at Christ's feet, clothed and in his right mind, praying Him that he might be with Him, and yet willing at His bidding to go home to his friends and tell them of the

mercy Christ had shown him. Mary chooses the footstool *as a learner*, the sinner *as a penitent*, the demoniac as a grateful and *obedient disciple*.

Lord Jesus, may we ever thus abide near to Thee! May we learn of Thee! May we confess to Thee our sins! May we long to abide with Thee, and yet, at Thy command, be ready to go out into the world that knows Thee not, and tell others of all Thou hast done for us!

But especially should we here look at Mary. What a calm, holy, deep joy she felt as she drank in the lifegiving words of the Son of Man! The eyes of her understanding were enlightened, and her whole soul was illuminated with the knowledge of Christ's love to her. She would fain learn more and more. The murmurings of her sister for her lack of service cannot disturb her. She would stay near her Lord till the instruction He would give her is ended.

It is our wisdom also thus to hear the

voice of the Good Shepherd. We need to sit directly under His own teaching. Many in our day call us to receive the teaching of man as if it were the infallible Word of the living God. We are to regard the voice of the Roman Pontiff as if it were Divine. We are to give up the right of private judgment. We are to believe the interpretation of Scripture given by an earthly priest, as if it were impossible for him to err. If only we be told "the Church teaches so and so," we are not to question it for a moment, but do as we are commanded. Let us beware of this danger. I believe the teaching of the Church of England, in her Articles and Formularies, is thoroughly sound and Scriptural. But to what does she point us? Not to the authority of the Church, but to the authority of the written Word. Let us read and search into the meaning of Holy Scripture, praying perpetually for the teaching of the only Infallible Interpreter, the Holy Ghost. Only take your Bible and read in a spirit of childlike faith

and obedience; only lift up your eyes to heaven, and ask the great Teacher to send you His good Spirit to instruct you; and you as truly sit at Jesus' feet and learn His word as did Mary in the home of Bethany.

But we must turn for a while to Martha. We can almost see her, so busy and active in preparing the repast for the Master. Nothing shall be left undone to add to His comfort. Such an opportunity of showing honour to her guest must not be lost. Then, in her anxious zeal, her eye glances at her sister. Why is this? Why should she do all the work? Why not Mary assist in lightening the necessary toil? Then her heart grows fretful. She complains of her sister; yea, and of Christ too. By thus talking to Mary, He keeps her from sharing the labour. She would have Him bid her come and help.

How much dross is mingled with the gold! How much that is sadly imperfect mars the faith and love of God's people! We see Martha's weak point. She was true and

genuine in her affection for the Saviour, but she misjudged the way in which best to show it. She thought chiefly at the moment of that which concerned His temporal comfort. She forgot that Christ delighted more in giving than in receiving. She little thought of the joy that it was to Him to pour into the heart of Mary that living water of Divine truth which she was so eagerly thirsting after.

Truly, Martha, thou didst well in receiving Christ beneath thy roof, and in desiring to pay due honour to thy Redeemer. Very different wert thou from Simon, of whom Christ complained that he gave Him not the water to wash His feet. Yet, Mary, thou didst far better in sitting down so humbly at His feet, in so gladly opening thine ear to hear and thine heart to receive His instruction and the abundant dew of His grace, which He thus bestowed upon thee. No joy can sinner give to the Saviour greater than this,—the joy of giving life and salvation,

the joy of filling the empty vessel with the fulness of His mercy and love.

And yet again we ask, Why should Martha be *cumbered*? Why so over-anxious and disturbed in mind? Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart; and if there be the willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath and not according to that he hath not.

It is a fault with some Christians to be too anxious even in their work for the Lord. The spirit is burdened and depressed with the weight of the charge laid upon them. Far better this indeed than neglect and indifference and half-heartedness; but would it not still more honour Him we serve to trust Him more, to do our utmost and leave results in His hands, to expect great things and yet be willing to wait hopefully on Him till He vouchsafe to send them?

But still more do we dishonour Christ, and destroy our own peace, when we allow the various little trials of every-day life too much

to fill our hearts and occupy our thoughts. No one can tell the injury which a clouded, burdened, anxious disposition works to a Christian and to those around him. It prevents all happiness and comfort in prayer. It leads to many little disputes and quarrels which might otherwise be avoided. It gives to others a false view of religion, and thus places a stumbling-block in the path of inquirers.

Dear reader, do you ask, How can you avoid it? I have no doubt you may have numberless thorns and briers along your path. You have difficulties that no stranger knows anything of. Yet God has revealed a sure remedy. He has told us with child-like confidence, to put every matter, small and great, into His hands. He has bidden us roll upon Him, our pitiful Father, our cares, our fears, our needs, our manifold distresses, and He will undertake for us.

A widow with several children was remarked by a lady to be always humming

some cheerful hymn ; and the inquiry was made, "how it was that, with so many little ones to provide for, she seemed always happy ? Had she not many cares and anxieties with them ?" The answer she gave was a very instructive one. "Yes," she said : "I have many, many anxious thoughts ; but I seldom keep them more than a few minutes ; for as fast as they come I cast them on the Lord."

Oh, that we could act in this spirit, and thus obey the precept—"Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your requests known unto God."

Very earnestly does Christ warn Martha against this spirit of over-carefulness. It is interesting to mark how He doubles the name. When He desired to impress some great lesson He often did this.

That He might for ever fix in men's hearts the remembrance of His forbearance and compassion toward the perishing, He speaks

thus to Jerusalem : “ *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.*”

When He would solemnly warn Peter of his danger, He speaks to him in a similar way. “ *Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat.*” Even so does He address Martha. He would awaken her to see her mistake. He would lead her to blame herself instead of Mary. He would show her the evil of being burdened and distracted by needless care: “ *Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken from her.*”

“ One thing is needful.” Not *many* things, but *one*. Not the provision for the table, the meat that perisheth, but the bread of life, the word of salvation; for “ man liveth not by bread alone, but by every

word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Dear reader, one thing is needful for thee,—that thy soul should be saved, thy sin forgiven, thy peace assured, thy title to life eternal made secure. One thing is needful,—to live in friendship with God, to die in joyful hope, to awake in glory. One thing is needful,—the wedding garment to cover thee, the pearl of great price to enrich thee, the water of life to refresh thee, the balm of Gilead to heal thee, the Rock of Ages to shelter thee, the Everlasting arms to uphold thee, the wing of thy Redeemer to cover thee.

Yes, "one thing is needful;" in a word, CHRIST: His love, His presence, His grace, His image, His glory! With this thou art rich and happy through eternal ages!

"Perish every fond ambition,
All I've sought, or hoped, or known,
Yet how rich is my condition,
God and heaven are still my own."

And this was Mary's portion. This was her rich inheritance. This was the good part which she had chosen, and which should never be taken from her. Her choice was without wavering or hesitation. She could say in truth, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed. I have one desire, one aim, one deep longing,—to know Thee, to love Thee, to cleave to Thee more and more."

Had she been placed in the position of the young man who had great possessions, and Christ had bidden her relinquish them, she would at once have joyfully done so.

Had she been tempted by some fair promise of high rank, or of an advantageous union where she must have forsaken Christ, we know how soon her decision would have been taken.

Had she been threatened with exile, slavery, or death, we know full well she would rather have suffered all than renounce Christ.

Blessed art thou, my reader, if such is thy

choice also. You may be setting out on life's journey, and many pleasant pictures of future happiness may present themselves to your imagination. But these may prove only as the mirage in the desert. But if Christ be your choice, you have joys in store that shall not fail you. You may have sorrows, as Mary had afterwards; you may be troubled and tempted, and have to bear the scorn of the ungodly; but I can promise you that you will never repent of the choice you have made. A young Jewess in Amsterdam embraced the Gospel, and had to make great sacrifices for Christ. She had to leave mother, brother, and sisters, that she might win Him; yet she did not repent. Hear her own words: "All besides lost, but Christ chosen; and I have found in Him more than all that I have lost."



II.

THE DARK CLOUD.

HERE are lights and shades in the fairest landscape. Thus are there days of sorrow as of gladness in the happiest home.

Seldom, perhaps, has there been more true, solid happiness, than in the home of Bethany. The bond of Divine grace knit all together in genuine Christian affection. Each eye was fixed on the same blessed hope, each ear hearkened to the voice of the Good Shepherd, each heart beat with love to the same gracious Friend. Yes, and with unchangeable, everlasting love, did that merciful Saviour regard every member of the household. "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."

Oh, that there were amongst us more of this union in Christ, more family religion,

more love to the Saviour, and love to each other in Him! But how shall it be? I know but one way. If there be one in a home to whom the Redeemer's name is dear, let that one feel a deep responsibility for the souls of the rest. You, perhaps, dear reader, may be that one. If you are, take heed that you leave no stone unturned to bring all who live with you to Jesus' feet. Offer on their behalf daily prayer that your Father would bestow on them His quickening Spirit; manifest toward them perpetually, true, self-denying kindness; never lose an opportunity of doing anything, small or great, that may show how you desire their welfare; be gentle, forbearing, forgiving; let there be a quiet consistency of life that speaks louder than many words; and then watch for occasions to speak a word in season that may win them to Christ. Let parents deal tenderly with the young ones; not only praying *for* them, but *with* them, and especially when some fault or sin has been yielded to. In this way you may hope

and expect true piety to increase in your home; and that such as are still wanderers from the path of life may be brought into the household of faith.

But even in the brightest, happiest home,—a home where Christ is loved best,—*dark days* come. Thus was it at Bethany. Sickness comes, and with it distress and anxiety and fear. Lazarus is laid low, and the sisters watch by his sick-bed with sorrowful, trembling hearts. He is the stay of their home, their guardian, their protector, perhaps their provider also. And so they send a message to the Saviour. They tell Him of their trouble. They think it enough to leave it in His hands. Doubtless He will come to succour them in their hour of sorrow, as He has cheered and instructed them in happier seasons.

The message brings no surprise to Christ. He has known it all long before. He calmly replies that all would be well. It shall not be unto death, but for His glory, and that of the Father: “This sickness is not unto death,

but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby."

There seems something strange, at first sight, in this close bringing together of grace and love and sickness, in these few verses of John xi. Here is Mary loving Christ, and Christ loving Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus ; and yet side by side with it we read of the brother being sick, and great sorrow coming to the home, in spite of Christ's love.

Yet, after all, is it not Love's accustomed way? Divine love works, not so much for the present comfort of its object, as for the joy that lasts eternally. It strikes heavy blows, sends temptations of various kinds, commands the storm and tempest, kindles the furnace, brings down the flail of threshing, cuts to the quick with the sharp pruning-knife ; and all because it is love, and because the purposes of love must be fulfilled.

True, sickness has a side of judgment. Looking at it in one aspect, we see that it comes as a part of the curse, as one of the

bitter fruits of sin. It comes as a reminder that if God is Love, He is also Righteous. It comes as a forerunner of eternal woe to those who refuse to listen to its teachings. But I would rather look at it on its *side of mercy and love*. Since we are sinners living in a world of evil, I cannot but reckon it a wise and merciful ordinance of Him who knoweth what is in man, to send us pain, suffering, disease. It is a visitor we never like to see enter our homes, yet not seldom does she leave behind blessings for which we are thankful to our latest day. "The Lord doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." "Whom the Lord loveth He correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."

Sickness often shows to men the realities of life.

With too many life passes by as in a dream. For the present everything is pleasant and fairly comfortable. Business prospers, and there is an average amount of comfort. So

days and weeks and months roll on. Life speeds away like the express train. One milestone on life's journey after another is left behind. And all the while the great object of life is left out of sight. The long, long life that follows when this short one is over,—that this is our sowing time, and that the reaping,—that every day the soul is receiving a stamp, an impression, that will never be lost,—that all around there are elements of untold evil or good to us, according as we use them,—all this is left in the pew at church, as an occasional thought for a Sunday hour, or forgotten perhaps altogether.

But God sends a sickness, a fever, an attack of some painful disorder, a broken limb, a severe accident of some kind. "Go, sickness, smite that man, lay him low on a bed of languishing, of suffering, of pain; show him how frail he is, how uncertain is life, how soon he may be carried to his long home; bid him recall the days that are past, the

sins he has committed, the mercies he has received, the ingratitude he has shown to One who has watched over him and blessed him from his youth."

Then, it is, by the grace of the Spirit, a man begins oftentimes to turn to God. His sins stand out clear before him ; he thinks of the judgment to come,—he looks into the grave and sees how utterly unprepared he is ; he brings to mind messages he has heard from the lips of Christ's ministers ; he talks with himself, "What have I been doing ? Whither am I going ? Where is my hope and confidence ?" Then, perhaps, the light tale or novel is laid aside, the newspaper is less cared for, the dusty Bible is brought out. The cry arises, "What must I do to be saved ?"

A few years ago, a young man was laid low with a dangerous illness. He had hitherto neglected the Saviour, and felt wholly unfit for eternity. As he lay upon that sick-bed, the Scripture lessons he had learnt at the

National school seemed written up before him on the walls of his room. He remembered the earnest words of counsel spoken to him by the clergyman in the Bible lessons he had given in the school, and he determined that if he recovered he would endeavour to practice them. His resolution was not in vain ; but for years to come, he walked in the way of life.

In this way sickness leads many to the feet of Jesus. Pride and self-confidence are cast down. As a man turns over and over on his couch, he sees how completely he is in the hand of God. He hath wounded—will He heal? He hath smitten—will He restore? He sees, too, how unable he is by any goodness or righteousness of his own to reconcile himself to God. Thus is he humbled and brought low, and ready to accept the helping hand and the forgiving mercy of the Friend of sinners.

When Jesus was on earth, many by sickness were brought to His footstool. The

palsied man had been led to feel his sinfulness, and joyfully heard the word of mercy—“Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.” The nobleman of Capernaum was led to Jesus by the fever which threatened the life of his son; and thus, we are told, the whole family were taught to believe in Him.

Yes, at such times as these men need solid ground beneath their feet, and it is well if they seek for it and find it. Some, even then, are content with uncertain and delusive hopes. Bunyan tells us that Ignorance was ferried over the river of death by Vain Hope. Many a guilty, unpardoned soul dies with a lie in his right hand.

Dear reader, it is not unlikely you have had such seasons of sickness; and if you have, will you ask yourself, What fruit have they borne? What blessing have they left behind? Have they brought thee nigh to God? Have they taught thee to cast thy sins on thy Saviour, and to choose Him as thy Refuge and Portion for ever? Or, has it

been just the reverse? Have you been hardened in sin when the danger was past? Has the world regained its old power? Has the voice of the rod been disregarded?

Another thought here. A sick-bed without Christ is an awful thing, and not seldom leads to a hopeless grave; but health spent without Christ is the road to both. Remember, you may never have a sick-bed. The thread of life may be snapped asunder in a moment. We know not what a day may bring forth. There may be but "a step between us and death."

Oh, the perilous snare of delay! It is a crafty foe; it is a serpent by the way that biteth the heel, and a man falls into the pit which the enemy has prepared.

But sickness also often becomes *a means of much spiritual profit to the children of God.*

The sickness of Lazarus had a very blessed issue. It brought glory to Christ. It led the way to one of His very greatest works. It manifested His Divine power. It gave the sisters a deeper view into the tender love

of His heart. It tried, and thereby strengthened, their own faith. It was no doubt also of profit to Lazarus himself. He would hereafter be drawn still nearer to the Saviour.

It is ever thus that God sanctifies His people in the school of affliction. The quiet graces of the Christian character are especially drawn forth at such times. Patience and experience and simple trust in God's love, a firmer reliance on the promises of Holy Scripture,—all these are often the direct and evident fruits of suffering and pain. Never have I seen a more lovely Christian character than in a lowly cottage in a village near Cambridge. Truly, her face "shone like that of an angel," so full was she of faith and hope and heavenly light and love. And it was the result of the Spirit's work wrought in her through *twenty-seven years* of disease. She had, when I knew her, a strange complication of suffering. She was totally blind, she had an affection of the spine and of the heart, a cancer in the throat, and other

maladies beside ; and yet never was there a Christian more abounding in joy and peace in believing.

Let not the Christian, then, be weary of this trial of sickness, or of others which the Father may appoint. Despair not if trials seem almost beyond endurance. At the end you will see that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

Some years ago I heard an allegory which I have never forgotten. It often comes back to me when I think of the way in which the Lord leads His people. The fable runs,— that a few ears of wheat were growing in the corner of a field, and it was promised to this wheat that it should one day be brought before the Queen. But by-and-by the mower came with his sharp scythe and cut the wheat, and feeling the sharpness of the scythe, it said, "I shall never stand before the Queen." Presently it was laid in the waggon, and pressed and borne down by the other sheaves, and again arose the cry of distress and de-

spair. But, more than this, it was laid on the threshing-floor, and the heavy flail came down upon it ; it was taken to the mill, and cut and cut and cut ; then it was kneaded into bread ; and at last it was placed in the hot burning oven. Again and again was heard the cry of utter, hopeless despair. But at length the promise was fulfilled, and the *bread* was placed on the Queen's table.

There is a great truth beneath the fable. Christians are God's wheat, sprung from the incorruptible seed of His Word, and from the precious seed of the crucified, buried body of our Lord ; and He purposes that one day they shall stand before Him. But there needs much preparation. There comes the sharp scythe of bereavement, the loss of child or parent or friend ; there comes the oppressive burden of care ; there comes the severe *tribulation* (the very word signifies threshing), seasons of adversity and disappointment ; there comes the mill, the temptation that utterly breaks us down, and

fills the whole spirit with distress ; there comes the hot furnace of agonizing pain or fear ; and all these are doing their appointed work, stirring up faith and prayer, humbling to the very dust, and yet lifting up the Christian, by leading him nearer to God, and enabling him at length to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

Christian, take courage, keep hold of the promise, wait on God, and all shall end well.

"In patience, thou the path of duty run ;
God never does, nor suffers to be done,
But that which thou wouldest do, if thou couldst see
The end of all events as well as He."

We must add a few words as to *the Christian's resource in days of sorrow and anxiety*.

The sisters turned at once to Christ. In one brief sentence they reveal to Him the story of their present distress: "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick."

Thus must we ever act. Faith casts itself upon Incarnate Love. Faith rolls its burden on One who alone is able to remove it. Faith

tells its sorrow into the ear of the Saviour, and with Him leaves the result.

Learn, here, that the repose of the Christian must ever be Christ's love to the sinner, and not the sinner's love to Christ. We read not, "Behold, Lazarus, *who loveth Thee*, is sick;" but "Behold, he whom *Thou lovest* is sick." True, there was in the heart of the sick brother real true love to the Saviour, and yet but a feeble spark compared to the love of Christ toward him.

Ah, do not measure Christ's love to you by your love to Christ! I know full well that the constant questioning of the heart is, *Do I love Christ as I ought?* And the answer invariably is the same. There is too much coldness, too much forgetfulness toward Him whom yet we desire to love above all things. What is to be done? Believe Christ's love to you as utterly unloving. Go to Him as a sinner, though you feel you have never loved Him at all, and trust His mercy and grace. Then lay your heart before Him, and beseech

Him to warm that cold, dead heart with the bright beams of His love. Sure I am, the more you believe Christ's love and trust in Him, the more will there be a response within, and the reflection of His love will be felt in your own heart.

Learn, moreover, to unfold to Christ all your sorrows, and leave them confidently in His hand. Let neither the insignificance of any matter, nor its overwhelming pressure, prevent you from taking it to Him. He sees the end from the beginning. He may not act as you desire, but He will act wisely and kindly. He is your Shepherd: therefore will He lead you in the right way. He is your Physician: therefore will He appoint the best medicine. He is your High Priest: therefore will He never forget you, but will bear your name on His breastplate of love perpetually.

“It is enough, my gracious Lord,
Thy tender sympathy;
That sorrow cannot be too deep,
Which I may bring to Thee.”

III.

LOVE'S DELAY, AND THE JOURNEY TO JUDÆA.

HE ways of God are very unlike the ways of man. His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways. When we might expect Him to act in one way, we find Him acting in the very reverse.

We see this clearly in the story of Bethany. The sick brother is tended carefully, anxiously, by the two loving sisters. They have sent a messenger to Jesus with the news of their brother's illness, and each moment they anticipate his return, and doubt not that Jesus will come with him. Surely their Friend, their Saviour, cannot and will not refuse their urgent desire. Surely He will come and stand by the sick-bed of Lazarus, and bid health and strength return. But, lo, it is far otherwise! They are sorely disappointed. The

messenger returned,—and no Saviour. Not even is there a message to tell them that He will come shortly. Hour by hour, moment by moment, they watch and wait and hearken for a sign of His coming, but in vain. They wait for the Lord as those that watch for the morning, but He comes not to relieve their distress.

Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, and now it is evident that the last scene is near. Lazarus must die, and Christ still absent! Yes: and now all is over. The silver cord is loosed, and the golden bowl is broken, and the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the dust returns to the earth as it was. The speedy burial takes place, and the mourners come, and sorrow bewails the sleeping one,—but no Saviour. One, two, three days still pass, days of heaviness and anguish, and still no sign of the Master's approach. "Strange, very strange, all this," might they say one to another. "Very strange that He should seem so to forget us. But there is some reason for

it. We dare not, we will not believe that He loves us one whit less than we thought!"

Love's delay! How frequent do we find it in God's dealings with His people!

For five-and-twenty long years and more does Abraham wait ere God gives the son He has promised. For more than four hundred years does the promise of Canaan remain ere its fulfilment. For more than four thousand years do men expect the Messiah, first promised in Eden.

Why is this? Why does prayer often arise, and yet so long a period pass before the answer comes? Why does the faithful Jehovah give promises so sure and certain, and yet permit many a year to pass before they are fulfilled?

Ever remember that with God there is an infinity of power, and an eternity in which to display it. If *we* have an important work to do, we must make haste and do it at once, or the opportunity is gone; our time will be over, or we may no longer have the power to accomplish it. Not so with God. His arm

never grows weary ; His years never fail. From everlasting to everlasting He is God. So that we must not doubt or faint when He keeps us waiting a while. Though the vision tarry, wait for it. It will surely come, it will not tarry.

Sometimes God keeps His people waiting because great works are long in maturing. The gourd springs up in a night, and perishes in a night ; but the giant oak grows more slowly, yet abides for a century. So God's works are great and glorious, and last for ever. This very story of Bethany, through more than eighteen centuries, has been a rock of strength to all God's sorrowful ones. The work of redemption, so long delayed, is to be the theme of endless praise by saints on earth and in heaven.

God keeps His people waiting oftentimes that He may deepen spiritual feeling, that He may quicken their souls to more earnest prayer. Our spiritual life is far too shallow ; our prayers are far too formal. We want the

Divine Teacher by any means to change this. And He does it in this way,—He calls forth more earnest desires, more fervent petitions, by the season of delay which He appoints. Ah, what days of spiritual experience, what days of growth in faith and patience and knowledge of the Saviour, were those spent by the sisters! How thankfully would they ever look back to those dark, dark hours! And so is it always in such seasons with God's people. Who teacheth like God?

God keeps His people waiting that He may the more manifest His own exceeding grace and power. He writes a sentence of death on all human means of accomplishing our desires, and then in His own marvellous way steps in and does far more than ever we have looked for. If Lazarus had never died, if he had not lain four days in the grave, we should never have had the story of Christ's greatest miracle, or such a proof of His resurrection power. The delay enhanced beyond all

conception the glory of the miracle, and manifested His own majesty and might.

Long had Joseph to wait ere he could see the purpose of God's dealings with him ; but at last he saw the reason for it all. The exile, the false accusation, the dungeon, the thirteen years of trial and suffering,—all these manifested the more fully the wonder-working providence of the great Disposer of all things.

For nine years did Monica, the mother of Augustine, pray on in vigorous and persistent hope for her son, whilst he was rolling in the filth of sin, attempting sometimes to rise, and then sinking deeper than before ; but at the end the grace and mercy of God were the more evident for the long delay.

For a whole lifetime did a Christian woman bear with a cruel and intemperate husband, ever returning good for evil, and continuing fervent in prayer for his salvation ; and in old age did the man go out into the woods and confess his former sins, and find there the Saviour whom his wife so long had loved.

Ah, sorrowing Christian, watch and wait and pray at mercy's gate ; and for all thy waiting shall there be a double recompense ! What are a few days of weeping compared with the joys of eternity ?

But if Christ delays, He does not deny help to those who seek Him. After a while Christ purposes to go again into Judæa and console the sisters.

What a calm quiet dignity is there about the movements of Christ ! Like the sun and moon moving on in their orbits,—like the pillar of the cloud guiding Israel in the wilderness,—so was it with Christ. He was never in a hurry, but when the due season came, He rose up and went on His way. For two days did He abide still in the same place where He was, and then He bade His disciples prepare to follow Him into Judæa.

Yes : and as we see there was no haste,—no hurrying, for He had all power in His hand, and had it been His good pleasure, He could have healed Lazarus by His word,

without going to Bethany at all,—so neither was there any shrinking back from the fear of man. The disciples fear the persecution of the Jews. They have lately sought to stone Christ, and they may do so again; but what matters this? Christ holds the reins. Man cannot touch one hair of His head or that of His disciples, except as He shall permit it.

Believer, when the Lord calls thee forth to go on His errands, to speak for Him, to witness for Him amongst the ungodly, do not shrink back. Do not refuse to obey His call. In days like our own, when the powers of evil are so mighty, no Christian ought to hold back his testimony, but go forth manfully and strive to rescue souls from the kingdom of darkness.

“Ah, but my natural disposition is retiring: I am not fitted for speaking to others.”

But are you to follow nature, or the guiding of God’s Word and Spirit? Was not God angry with Moses, because he pleaded that

he was slow of speech? Did not Christ bid the demoniac go home to his friends and tell them what great things the Lord had done for him?

"Ah, but I am afraid of what others will say or do."

Nay, my friend, be not afraid of them that kill the body. Take Christ with you ; believe that He is by your side ; lift up your eyes to Him for wisdom and strength, and then you need not fear though all the world were against you.

A catechist in Tinnevelly was cruelly beaten and half-killed by the heathen whom he strove to win for Christ ; but after his recovery, he was asked in what part of the country he would prefer to labour. "Send me again to the very place where I have been ill-treated," he said ; and there he went and continued his work for Christ.

The words of Christ, in which He reproved the timidity of the disciples, are full of wise teaching for ourselves. The disciples say to

Christ, "Master, the Jews of late sought to stone Thee ; and goest Thou thither again ?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day ? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him."

As if Jesus would say, "Be not afraid for my sake : there is no cause for fear. I have my twelve hours, of which none can deprive me. True, foes may be on my right hand, and on my left. True, scribes and Pharisees and chief-priests may be filled with envy and wrath. Nevertheless, all is well. If need be, legions of angels shall defend and guard Me till my appointed work is done."

But in these words Christ looks beyond Himself to His disciples and to men in all time. The lesson is for the world. Man has his time, his opportunity, his day of grace and mercy ; but it is short and limited : twelve hours, and no more. They may be

very short hours, or they may be longer, but they will soon pass.

Dear reader, such is thy life. One short day, and then its great and blessed opportunities have fled, and for ever. Yes: and now there is light for thee! The glorious lamp of God's Word is ready to give thee light needful for every footstep. Every one of its ten thousand precious promises has its bright ray of light to guide and cheer thee if thou wilt receive it. Yea, Christ Himself will be thy light. In His Gospel He offers thee the light of knowledge, of pardon, and of hope.

“Hail, glorious Gospel,—heavenly light, whereby
We live with comfort and with comfort die ;
And view beyond this gloomy scene—the tomb—
A life of endless happiness to come.”

Is any reader of these pages earnestly desiring to find peace and salvation? Then be assured you shall not be left in the dark. The Ethiopian eunuch was seeking the way,

and the Lord sent Philip to instruct him. Cornelius was longing for God's favour, and the Lord sent Peter to his house.

But is there no danger to those who delay? Ah, there is the crafty serpent whispering in thine ear, "Wait a while. No need of being so hasty. Months and years are yet before thee. These things are very good in their place; but first enjoy the world and thy sins and thy pleasures a while longer, and by-and-by repent and believe."

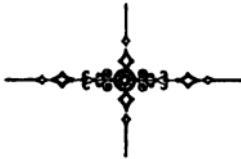
Nay, nay, do not hearken to this specious deceit. While the day is fresh, while the sun is in the east, set out on thy journey. To wait till the sun is setting is dangerous work for one who has such a journey to take. What if thy light goes out, and thou shouldest stumble and fall and perish! Thy foot may stumble on the dark mountains, and then thou shalt never reach the heavenly Jerusalem.

It is a solemn thought. *Each moment of delay the light to guide thee is being withdrawn.*

God gives light. He offers it to thee, but if rejected the darkness grows deeper. The shutters are put up; a thick mist gathers over thee; spiritual things become more and more unreal and distant; the conscience is dulled; the Spirit is withdrawn; the spirit of the world gains stronger power; and perchance the eye of the soul is fixed in spiritual death for ever. Is there no peril in this?

But life itself will soon be over, and then thy lot is cast for weal or woe. Some years ago I was preaching one Sunday afternoon, on the words, "Yet a little while is the light with you." I was urging those present at once to turn from sin and to believe in Christ. One man whom I had reason to know had long been living a profane and wicked life, was listening to the message. It was the last he heard. Whether he received the truth or not I cannot say; but the following Friday, being Good Friday, he was walking through the fields, and suddenly he was taken ill, and never reached his home alive.

Blessed are they who, while they have the light, believe in the light, walk in the light, and reach in safety the glorious city which has no need of the sun or moon, for the Lord Himself is its everlasting light.



IV.

THE MASTER IS COME.

CHRIST oftentimes spake in parables. A single word was often in His mouth an earthly veil of some heavenly truth. "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth," said Christ; "but I go that I may awake him out of sleep." The disciples mistake His meaning. They lose the beauty of our Lord's word. They think but of natural rest; and if he thus rest, what need of awaking? For he shall do well and recover. But Christ explains Himself: "Lazarus is dead." For their sakes this had been permitted. It should strengthen their faith to see the mighty work which their Master should thus perform.

"Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." What a cheering thought is here for those who belong to Christ! You are the friends of Jesus. You are the friends of Him who liveth and

was dead, and is now alive for evermore. You are the friends of Him who holds in His hand the keys of death, the grave, and the great world beyond,—of Him who reigns supreme. And for you and those who are one with you in Christ, death is a peaceful *sleep*.

The word looks backward and forward. It tells of rest from present toil and struggle and care. It tells of an awaking to a new day of blissful life. Even the sleep is one of blessedness ; for the spirit lives in the consciousness of a Saviour's presence, and tastes more of sweet fellowship with Him than is possible on earth.

Ah, Christian, fear not death ! Tremble not at the grave ! It may indeed appear to thee in a dark and gloomy mask ; thou mayest fear the suffering and the sorrow and the parting scene ; but there is a friendly face behind, there is a joyful greeting on the other shore.

A young sailor was dying on board ship in

the Chinese seas, far away from all whom he loved. But he saw the joy awaiting him. He had been awakened and brought to God some time previously, by borrowing from the captain's chest an old book, "Alleine's Alarm to the Unconverted," and now after a few days' illness he was called away. But he died rejoicing: "Farewell, mother; farewell, England. Welcome, Jesus; welcome, heaven; welcome, eternity."

It is interesting in this story of Bethany to remember the saying of Thomas which followed this conversation of Christ with His disciples. We often think only of Thomas as the picture of a doubting, unbelieving disciple. Let us not forget that there was in him the spirit of true self-denying love. Christ purposed to go into Judæa. Thomas thought the Jews would kill Him; but if so, he was ready to share the danger. Then said Thomas, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

We may learn a lesson here. Let us look

at the best side of a Christian's character. "A diamond with a flaw is better than a pebble without one." A Christian may have some grave infirmity; he may fail very grievously at some crisis of his Christian career; yet for all that he may be one of Christ's jewels, and may shine brightly hereafter in His crown.

At length Jesus sets out on His way to Judæa, and reaches Bethany. The sisters had a weary, sorrowful season of waiting, but it had an appointed limit. Christ tarries not a moment too long. "Wherefore tarry the wheels of His chariot?" might be the oft-repeated inquiry. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter," was the spirit of our Lord's reply.

Holy Scripture forbids despair to any who wait on the Lord. A Jewish proverb declares, "When the tale of bricks is doubled, Moses comes." So when darkest falls the night to Christian hearts, the morning of joy is approaching.

“Then when Jesus came He found that he had lain in the grave four days already.” What could have looked more hopeless than this? and yet all ended well. When the sisters saw the issue of it all, they could trace abundant lovingkindness in every moment’s delay.

Dear reader, never despair! In the darkest hour, *hope thou in God*. What is it that now distresses you? Is it the most terrible blow that could possibly have fallen upon you? Is it a season of pain almost beyond endurance? Is it a loss that takes all heart, all pleasure out of life? Is it a darkness of soul that seems to block out all comfort, that seems to shut against you the door of mercy?

Still yield not to despair. Whether a *better* remedy can be found you may be disposed to doubt, but certainly a *worse* cannot be. Ah, when hope is dead,—buried,—four days in the grave,—then Jesus comes, and with Him light and joy and deliverance!

When Jesus comes to Bethany, the two

sisters act differently. Methinks Martha is now rather to be commended than Mary. Mary nurses her sorrow, and can scarce look up or think of anything but her lost brother. But Martha rises up and goes forth to meet Jesus.

How is it with Christians now in their days of sorrow? Some by faith and expectation are ready to welcome the first bright gleams of hope. Some sit down in a gloomy half-despair, their eyes "blinded by unbelief-fears," and think that never again shall they see comfort and joy on earth. So was it with Israel of old in their bondage. They hearkened not to Moses, because of anguish of spirit and for cruel bondage. Ah, Mary! why didst thou not rise up to meet thy Saviour? Might He not lighten thy burden? Might He not speak some word that should cheer thy desolate heart?

Let Christians avoid this spirit. Hope against hope, and believe in darkest hours that help may be near. Such unbelief makes

the heavy burden heavier ; it lengthens out the time of trial ; it shuts out the consolation that God sends thee. Instead of this, watch for the light. Go forth to meet thy Lord. He may come to thee by a promise, by a providence, by a whispered thought ; but whichever way it be, welcome His presence.

One of the most instructive features in the narrative is the gentle reproach of the two sisters. We hear the selfsame words from both Martha and Mary,—first from the one, and then later on from the other. This tells a tale. It shows that what they spake to Jesus, they had again and again spoken in their hearts and to each other : “Ah, if only Christ were here, it would be otherwise ! We should soon see our sick one recover. Strange is it He comes not to relieve our anxiety.” And now they say this to Christ Himself : “Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.”

Was it the right word to speak ? There was faith in it, for it recognised a certain

measure of power and help in Christ ; but there was unbelief, too, for it limited Christ's power. Could He not have healed by a word, as He healed the nobleman's son ? Did it not likewise cast a doubt upon His wisdom and goodness ? Did it not imply that there was something unkind, something they could not reconcile with His love in thus leaving their brother to die ?

Unbelief often lurks in a reference to second causes. If only such and such had been the case,—if only matters had been so ordered,—if such a person had come in,—if we had gone to such a place, or done such a thing ; or if some one else had acted differently, then all would have been well ! Ah, poor foolish heart, do not torment thyself thus ! ” If God had willed it, might not such have been the case ? Canst thou not see His hand in all that pertains to this bitter sorrow of thine ? Never so forget thy responsibility as to neglect the use of the means that God hath put into thy hand. Never so forget the

overruling providence of God, as to fix thine eye on second causes, and doubt that the Lord reigneth.

“The lot is cast into the lap, the disposing thereof is of the Lord.” “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.” “All things work together for good to them that love God.”

But faith shines out again in the words of Martha: “But I know, that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee.” Scarcely dare Martha permit the rising hope to take any definite shape. She might be looking for too much; and yet in the presence of that Mighty One she could not but entertain some glimmering hope that even yet help might be granted, and her brother given back.

But in these words of Martha we are brought face to face with a great truth! Christ is our prevailing Intercessor: “Whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, He will give it Thee!” Thus spake Martha, and thus may we say also.

What courage and boldness should this impart to us in prayer! O Lord, I have no right to expect anything, for my sin is ever bearing witness against me; but Christ is worthy. He asks for me all I need, and therefore with confidence do I look for all I need.

Then comes the first word of hope and promise. As if Christ would say to Martha, —I know what you hint at; I know that secret suggestion, and it shall be even so. Your desire shall be accomplished: "Thy brother shall rise again."

But Martha puts away from her the comfort which Christ would give. She ought at once to have embraced the hope; but she imagines that Christ speaks of that which is too far distant to console in her present distress. "Yes: true, there is another life; but far, far away is that glorious rising again; years must roll by ere the trumpet-call shall summon my brother from the grave."

But why not use the telescope of faith?

It brings very near the things which may be yet in the distant future. It gives reality and present possession to that which may be removed from us by the interval of many centuries: "Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day, and he saw it and was glad." Such a faith enables the soul to discern a Saviour coming in glory; the saint arising from the dead in a body made like unto that of Christ; all those in Christ now separated, meeting together to spend a glad eternity in the presence of their Lord.

But the Lord turns the thought of Martha to Himself. Away from the last day, away from her brother, He would fix and centre every thought on Himself, the source of all resurrection life: "You speak of that which shall happen when time shall be no more. I bid you think of Him who has all power now and hereafter. In Me dwelleth the power of resurrection life. As I will, when I will, can I manifest it. I can manifest it now, in raising up your brother, these four

days lying in the grave. I can manifest it in the great day, by bidding every soul who believeth in Me come forth to a new and glorious life." "I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

Christian reader, lay firm hold of the eight great "I Am's" of this Gospel, exactly meeting the need and misery of the sinner.

Do you confess,—

I am but frail, the child of a day, and I need a mighty, everlasting Friend?

Christ meets this: "Before Abraham was I AM." Thus proclaiming Himself the Great Jehovah.

Do you confess,—

I am famished and hungry in soul; I long for solid, substantial joy?

Christ meets this: "*I am* the Bread of Life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger."

Do you confess,—

I am an exile, a prodigal far from home,
far from safety?

Christ meets this: “*I am* the Door: by
Me if any man enter in he shall be saved.”

Do you confess,—

I am a wanderer from the fold; straying
far away over the mountains of vanity and
sin?

Christ meets this: “*I am* the Good Shep-
herd, and know my sheep, and am known of
mine.”

Do you confess,—

I am in darkness, and know not how to
find my way?

Christ meets this: “*I am* the Light of the
world: he that followeth Me shall not walk
in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

Do you confess,—

I am out of the way; yea, ignorant, and
my soul is dead?

Christ meets this: “*I am* the Way, the
Truth, and the Life.”

Do you confess,—

I am strengthless and fruitless?

Christ meets this: "*I am* the Vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."

Do you confess,—

I am a dying sinner in a dying world?

Christ meets this: "*I am* the Resurrection and the Life."

Ah, reader, lay hold by faith of these exceeding great and precious promises. They will assure you of complete acceptance, in spite of all unworthiness and sin. They will pierce every dark cloud. They will assure you of the presence and help of an ever-living Redeemer, who is able to save to the uttermost. They will give an answer to every unbelieving doubt and fear. They will give you courage and grace to make as your own the noble confession of Martha: "Yea, Lord; I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God."

Yes: and when in cemetery or churchyard, over your body these mighty words of the

Saviour are read,—when in the ears of those who have loved you, the minister speaks,—“I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live,”—then shall your earthly tabernacle rest in its quiet dwelling-place, beneath the care of Death’s Destroyer, till He shall return, and in a glorified body you shall for ever be with the Lord.

“A few more years shall roll,
A few more seasons come :
And we shall lie with them that rest
Asleep within the tomb.

“Then, O my Lord, prepare
My soul for that great day :
Oh, wash me in Thy precious blood,
And take my sins away.”



V.

AROUND THE TOMB.

We mingle with a company of mourners. The Master has come, and Martha has called her sister, and somewhere in the outskirts of the little town Mary pours out her sorrowful complaint into the ear of the merciful Redeemer. The Jews follow her, and imagine that she goes again to weep at her brother's tomb. To that mournful spot Christ bids them come. So, gathered together in that sorrowing group, we see the two sisters, and with them the friends, who in truest kindness, would do their best to comfort them; and, above all, death's Conqueror, the Prince of Life, the great Burden-bearer, the one Friend and Helper of all who flee to Him for succour. He comes there to fulfil His own office,—“to bind up the broken-hearted, to comfort all that mourn, to give oil of joy

for sadness, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." With tears and groans He goes to the tomb. Scarce a word is spoken ; but in silent grief they walk along with Him who mingles His tears with their's, and yet is able effectually to wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Thrice we read in Holy Scripture Jesus wept, and it is hard to say on which occasion we learn most from the tears of the Son of Man.

On Olivet's slope, whilst the multitudes were rejoicing, crying aloud, "Hosanna," and casting their garments at His feet, the Saviour was weeping over the beloved city. He foresaw the coming doom ; He foresaw the cruelty of the Roman soldiers that would soon come and lay waste that fair city, and miserably destroy her sons and daughters ; yea, and He saw, moreover, the fearful woe beyond, to which sin and unbelief would bring them. Yes : Jesus wept over sinners perishing, and we too should weep.

Then, too, in Gethsemane's lonely garden did Jesus weep. As He was entering the dark cloud,—as He began to taste the exceeding bitterness of the cup of wrath which for us He drained even to the dregs,—we read of His thrice-repeated prayer, of His agony, of His sore wrestling, yea, of His strong crying and tears. (Heb. v. 7.) How these tears tell of sin's bitterness, of sin's curse, of the sure condemnation of those who bear their own sin and refuse the full atonement which Jesus has brought! Yea, how they tell of the madness of a life of hollow mirth, while God is angry, and judgment is following swiftly at men's heels!

But in this narrative we have Christ's tears at Bethany. "Jesus wept."

Perhaps we might have thought that since the brother was so soon to be restored, there was little need that Christ should weep. Yet surely there was. For their sakes who saw Him, for our sakes still more, and for His Church in all ages; for we read in those tears,

as we could scarcely do elsewhere, the true character of Him in whom we trust.

We may learn to know Christ as we listen to His gracious words. What a revelation of His heart is given in that short sentence spoken to the sons of Zebedee, when He refused to call down fire on the Samaritan village: "The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." We may learn to know Christ as we behold His works of mercy. As we see Him going about doing good, healing the lepers, feeding the hungry, and scattering on all sides the blessing of health and gladness, we trace in it all His marvellous bounty and kindness. We may learn to know Christ as we look upon the wounds in hands and feet and side. "He loved me and gave Himself for me," is the message that each seems to speak. But those tears of Christ seem also, in a most touching way, to show His compassion and sympathy. Very evidently did they subdue for the moment the hearts of those who saw

them. "Behold how He loved him!" was the spontaneous feeling of the mourners around.

If we seek to discover more particularly the cause of the tears which Jesus shed, we should probably be right in regarding it as of a very mingled character.

There were tears for the death of a friend.

"When sorrowing, o'er some stone I bend
Which covers what was once a friend,
And from his voice, his hand, his smile,
Divides me for a little while,
Thou, Saviour, mark'st the tears I shed,
For Thou didst weep o'er Lazarus dead."

There were tears of sympathy for the bereaved sisters. By reason of His Divine knowledge He could tell, as none other could, the terrible void in those loving hearts which their brother's death had made, and therefore He wept. "In all their affliction He was afflicted."

And was there not also a look stretching far beyond that particular case of sorrow, and

embracing in one field of vision all the havoc and misery and woe that the king of terrors has ever brought into this world of ours? Yea, and beyond this, a look into the very root and fountain of it all,—that accursed thing SIN, the parent of all evil!

The great lesson of this part of the story of Bethany seems to be *the sympathy of Christ*; and to this I desire to direct the attention of those who read these pages. Dear reader, the religion of the Gospel has many consolations; but none greater, none sweeter than this: “We have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

Remember, *the sympathy of Christ is within the reach of those who are yet strangers to God*. It is the sympathy of One without sin, and yet not without sin; for He bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that He might bring the blessing of His salvation nigh to the guilty. I have no doubt that

very many who read this book have not yet found a home and a refuge in God. But are you shut out from the grace and love of Christ? Only if you shut against yourself the door of mercy. A few months ago, I had an opportunity of visiting a poor murderer in his cell. Had I been able to offer him a free pardon signed by the Queen's own hand, how eagerly would he have grasped it! But suppose, under such circumstances, instead of doing so, he had rejected it, shut to the door, and sullenly preferred death: what could be said but that the fault was his own? Even thus, dear reader, does Jesus stand by thy door, offering to thee full remission and a sure salvation. It is within reach. It is very nigh. Thou hast but to accept it, and it is thine own.

It is a very common error for persons to imagine that we must first of all raise ourselves a certain distance, and then Jesus will come down to meet us.

Nay: this would be no good news to those

so helpless; so fallen, so guilty as we are. What could the lost sheep, exhausted and weary and footsore, do for its restoration, were not the Shepherd to come and carry it home to the fold? What could the soldier lying on the field of battle, faint from loss of blood, wounded, and near to death,—what could he do unless a friendly hand bring succour, and carry him to a place of safety? What could the man who fell amongst thieves and was lying half-dead on the way to Jericho,—what could he do, except the good Samaritan had come to his help? And what can the sinner do without Christ?

But He comes near to thee. He bends over thee, even as thou art. Lost, strengthless, wounded, perishing in thy blood, Jesus waits to lift thee up, to heal thy wounds, to bear thee in His arms, to save thee for ever. Oh, that the tears of Christ might show what a compassionate Saviour is thine, if only thou wilt yield thyself to Him! Ah, poor wanderer, you are not happy! Perhaps the chain

of some sin is around thee ; thou canst not break away from the snare of drink or some other perilous vice. But thy Redeemer is merciful, and thy Redeemer is strong, and by His cleansing blood and His all-powerful Spirit He can make thee a happy, holy Christian. "He that despiseth Him wrongeth his own soul. All they that hate Him love death."

Again, remember *the sympathy of Christ reaches all the depths and peculiarities of human sorrow.*

Strange and appalling is the variety of wretchedness and woe that burdens our earth. Go to that beautiful valley where the stream glides peacefully along, and all is lovely and fair ; or go to the spot where the smoke of the factory or the furnace makes all around look dark and dreary ; and in both you find aching hearts and weary troubled souls. Go to the mansion of the rich man, or the cottage of the labourer, or the confined room of the mechanic, and in some shape the enemy

comes to each. But in Christ there is a rich fulness of sympathy that reaches every case.

“Yea, and as if Thou wouldest be God
Even in misery,
Thou hast left no sorrow but Thine own
Unreached by sympathy.”

I can imagine, amongst the readers of these pages, one who is labouring for souls in a large town, sorely discouraged and depressed by the evil around. You have but scanty help, and those who are willing to help have neither large means nor much ability, and as you plod on, you see but a small number gathered in for Christ. And yet you go on. You often sigh over the sin you witness but cannot prevent. You often lift up your heart in some such prayer as that of the Psalmist, “Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but guide Thou the just!” or, perhaps, in the beautiful words of Bonar:—

“Come, Lord, and take away
The curse, the sin, the stain ;
And make this blighted world of ours
Thine own fair world again !”

But is there no loving eye that sees you,—no loving heart that feels for you? Surely there is. He knew the very grief you feel. He laboured on for His day of toil, preaching and teaching everywhere, speaking as never man spake ; yet at the end but few clave to Him, and many of those who had heard Him joined in the sin of crucifying the Lord of Glory.

He knows your desire, and He accepts it. Your work is not lost. Your words for Him shall be a sweet savour unto God. He will be glorified, and some, at least, brought home to God, who shall be your crown in the day of His appearing.

Or, I picture to myself a very different case. You are not a worker, but a sufferer. The tide of busy life rolls on around you, but you the while are scarcely able to move

from room to room. A terrible disease has laid its hand upon you, and neither day nor night brings rest or relief. Sleepless nights and agonizing pain are your constant portion. More than this, your faith is weak, and you are not sure of your acceptance; but you know your sins, and you flee to the Saviour, and have no hope but in His precious blood. Ah, how the Saviour feels for you! He counts each tear, and marks each sigh, and tells each groan, and would cheer your heart by His own word, "It is I: be not afraid. I will surely forgive, and save, and comfort. I will hold thee by thy right hand. I will bring thee through the waters; yea, in the furnace thou shalt not be burned. Thou shalt see the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy."

Or I take another case. You have a life-long trial in your own home. You might be very happy and comfortable, you have means that might easily suffice, *if rightly used, but—but—all goes one way.* The one who ought

most to help you,—the one who promised years ago in God's presence to love and to cherish till death should part between you,—is now your greatest fear and sorrow. You are worse than a widow. Your burden grows heavier day by day; and yet you pray and try patiently to bear up, and return kindness for cruel wrong. But you see no prospect of any change. Hopeless misery seems to lie before you. Nay, but remember Christ thinketh upon the oppressed. Read Psalms xxxvii., xl., xlvi., lvii., and lxii., and see whether there may not yet be a door of hope. Have Christ on your side, and be sure that He will be a husband to you, and your prayers shall come back to your own bosom. How they shall be answered I know not; whether in the salvation of the one for whom you plead, or in some other way; but this I know,—they shall so return in blessing that your heart shall sing for joy, and the voice of sighing and weeping shall give place to the sound of joy and thanksgiving. Very possibly it

may be here, if not it shall surely be hereafter.

Or I imagine another case. You have lost an only child. Around him all your thoughts had centred. You had watched over him in his infancy, you had loved to listen to his first lispings, and marked his growth from year to year, and did your best for his schooling ; and after all, he was taken from you. It was but a short illness and you were obliged to part, and now life is a blank and its interest is gone, and you feel scarcely able to do your work. Again and again the remembrance of your loss comes back to you afresh, and perhaps a flood of tears comes to relieve your distress.

Oh, remember Jesus in your grief! In very faithfulness He hath caused you to be troubled. He took your child that He might give you Himself. Perhaps, but for this, you would have had no room for Him. Your child would have been your idol, and would have occupied the temple where the Saviour Him-

self should dwell. But now Christ comes ; you have learnt your need of Him, and He comes to supply it. In deepest, in truest sympathy, He is by your very side. Think how He cared for the sisters when their one brother was taken. Think how He cared for the widow of Nain when her only son was called away. Think how He cared for Jairus when his only daughter was lying dead. And He is still the same. His compassions are ever new. He thinks on thy sorrow, and will heal thy wounded spirit by the exceeding consolations of His love.

And yet, there is one other testing trial,— the Christian pilgrim passing through the river of death. Think of the dying Christian. There he lies ; all has been done for him that man can do, but in vain. Hope is over. Those around him can only wait till the solemn moment comes, and he follows the path that leads to an eternal state. What thoughts may be crowding in while the lips refuse to speak ! It may be, the willing spirit happy in Christ,

anticipates and enjoys a sweet foretaste of the Lord's presence in glory. But "heart and flesh are failing," and "the flesh is weak." Christ's sympathy is needed, and it is nigh. In that hour of final conflict, what more fitted to dispel fear and strengthen hope, than the thought of Bethany and the Saviour standing by the tomb?

"Jesus wept ! That tear of sorrow
Is a legacy of love :
Yesterday, to-day, to-morrow,
He the same doth ever prove.
Lord, when I am called to die,
Let me think of Bethany."



VI.

THE MIGHTY VOICE.

HERE is a strange mingling of the human and Divine in the story of Bethany. Each manifests itself in harmony, yet in contrast: Christ was verily and indeed the Son of man. He was a brother, and had a brother's heart. Those tears of His, how deeply do they penetrate? Surely they tell of an experience of woe that to the uttermost limits of time shall never fail to console the mourner. But with these tears what a consciousness of Divine power do we recognise! To some of those present the tears He shed were an evidence of sympathy, but moreover, of weakness: "Could not this man," said they, "which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" He will soon give a glorious answer to this. How far His

power surpasses their doubting inquiries shall presently be manifest to all. So He comes nearer to the grave of His friend. And he comes still groaning.

Was that groan the expression of sorrow at the unbelief He witnessed? Was it the prayer the Father heard? Ah, remember a sigh, a look, a desire, a groan God-ward, is a prayer: and one never despised! The unspoken prayer ofttimes is most powerful in the ear of Him that searcheth the heart.

And now we stand close to the spot. There is the cave, the silent home of the beloved One. We hearken, and the Saviour speaks: "Take ye away the stone!" The command tells us that we must obey Christ's bidding if we would look for His help. He calls man to do that which is in his power, whilst He will do that which man cannot do. "Take ye away the stone!" Remove stumbling-blocks. Cast aside that which hinders.

To do this is the part of Christian Governments. There is no such thing as making

man fear God by any laws or Acts of Parliament; but those in authority may do much to encourage that which is good and right, and check that which is the reverse. How much more might be done toward the observance of the Lord's-day, thus setting free tens of thousands who are obliged to work seven days a week instead of six. How much might be done to diminish the fearful curse of intemperance, by a diminution of the number, and by a more strict supervision over public-houses.

It is also the part of every Christian to remove stumbling-blocks out of the way of others. Parents might do far more for their children, and mistresses for their servants, giving them more knowledge of God's Word, and bringing them within the sound of the Gospel of Christ.

But in the case of Martha, instead of obeying Christ's command, it would seem that she put a fresh stone in the way! Unbelief breaks out, and there is no such hind-

rance in Christ's way as this. "He could not do many mighty works there because of their *unbelief*." Faith draws down the power and grace of Jesus, but unbelief bars the door against it.

Poor Martha! why dost thou doubt thy Saviour's wisdom or thy Saviour's power? Why speak of the corruption of the grave? Truly, if mere earthly affection had said, "Take ye away the stone," thou mightest well have replied, "Leave him alone, for by this time he stinketh." It is a humbling thought. Look at man in his pride, his self-elation. See him glorying in his attainments or his possessions. Then look at that grave! "Let me bury my dead out of my sight!" said Abraham of Sarah, whom he had so loved. "By this time he stinketh," said Martha of the beloved brother. We say to corruption, "Thou art my father; and to the worm, Thou art my mother and sister." Look forward awhile, and what remains of the fairest or the strongest, but a few bones, a

handful of dust. Ah, vain man, wherefore wouldest thou be proud? "Man is like unto vanity: his time passeth away like a shadow." But Martha was forgetting whose voice had given the command. What are four days, or forty days, or forty years, to Him who is the Resurrection and the Life, who holds in His hands the keys of death and the grave?

Jesus gently reproves her. He reminds her of the promise that her brother should rise again, and how He had told her of the blessing to those that believe: "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe thou shouldest see the glory of God?"

Let the Christian remember this. Christ throws upon Martha a great responsibility. She must believe ere she could see. She must trust His power ere she could behold the mighty work He was willing to perform. Thus must we honour Christ also. We must believe in His help ere we can find it. Where did Martha err? She could only think of that dead body—of those sad four days—of

the gloom and corruption of the grave. Hence her faith was weak and dim, because her eye was not fixed on the mighty Redeemer who stood by her side.

We often fail in the same way. We look at the dead body of our guilt, of our corruption ; we feel ourselves so utterly bad and vile and unworthy, that we scarce think that salvation can be possible. We look at the utter ungodliness or worldliness of another till we fail to recognise the face of Him that can quicken the dead soul. We look at that black cloud, so gloomy and so threatening, or that deep distress and sorrow, till we shut out from ourselves all else, and cannot see a ray of hope beyond. Surely the voice of Christ to Martha chides our unbelief. Turn away thine eyes from thy sin, thy fear, thy sorrow, and behold the love and might of Him who stands near to help thee.

What a contrast we have in Abraham to the unbelief of Martha ! God promised him a son, and through that son a seed like the

stars of heaven and the sand on the sea-shore. And he fully believed it. "Being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb : *he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.*" he looked not at the difficulties in the way, but regarded only the promise and the power and the faithfulness of God.

Believe, and thou shalt see the glory of God! Thou shalt see the glory of His free salvation, of His full and complete justification, and of thy sure acceptance in the Beloved!

Believe, and thou shalt see the glory and grace of a present and merciful Redeemer, cheering thine heart and filling thee with joy unspeakable!

Believe, and thou shalt see glorious displays of His power on thy behalf, turning thy sorrows into joys, thy trials into blessings!

Believe, and thou shalt see souls, once dead and corrupt, changed and transformed,

rejoicing in the new life which the Spirit imparts !

Believe, and thou shalt see life triumphing over death, grace over sin, strength over weakness.

Believe, and thou shalt see the glory of the everlasting kingdom, a mansion in the skies, a throne with Christ, and a crown that fadeth not away !

The words of Christ were enough. They do His bidding. They roll away the stone, and thus by the very act they become witnesses of the power of Christ.

Then Christ gives thanks to the Father. He who lifted up his eyes in prayer, now lifts them up in praise and thankfulness. He needed not prayer, indeed, to enable Him to work this mighty work ; for by His own word, without prayer, He for the most part performed his mightiest miracles. He said to the waves, " Peace : be still ! " He said to the widow's son, " Young man, arise ! " but He would show that He was working in all

things with His Father, and in accordance with His will. He would show us, moreover, that in all we do we must look for help from above ; nor must we forget to thank our Father for the help He gives. Ere we speak to souls dead in their sins, let us first remember to plead on their behalf with Him who alone can give life.

Christ had spoken to the Father ; now He speaks to Lazarus. And He speaks with "a loud voice." The voice of Christ, for the most part, was quiet and gentle. He did not lift up nor cry nor make His voice heard in the street. His words were like the gentle dew, falling softly, and yet refreshing so many weary hearts. But sometimes, as now, for a special purpose, He speaks aloud. He gives one solemn command,—simple, plain, majestic : "LAZARUS, COME FORTH !"

And now within that silent grave Divine power is felt. Had all the voices of earth combined to say, COME FORTH ! death and the grave would have laughed at their puny

efforts to deliver man from their dread embrace. But not so with the voice of Jesus. The still grave hears *that voice*, and at once obeys. The flesh, just now corrupt and decaying, suddenly regains its former freshness. Every power and faculty is restored. The emancipated spirit, which had fled to other scenes, returns for a while to its tenement of clay. Lazarus lives ! That strange thing that we call life, so precious, so incomprehensible, so easy to destroy, and yet so impossible for human power to restore,—this is given back. Yet no vain curiosity has been satisfied by the resurrection of Lazarus. Whether he had revelations of the invisible state which his lips might have uttered,—whether he did tell something in the secret converse of the family with the beloved sisters,—this we know not. But this we know: that for us the message of the risen Lazarus is of Him who is the Resurrection and the Life. His one message to us is of the might and majesty and grace of our glorious Redeemer.

Lazarus comes forth,—but he comes forth bearing about with him the witness of His previous death. When Christ left the tomb, the napkin and grave-clothes were left behind ; but Lazarus comes forth, “ bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, and his face bound about with a napkin.” So we have a further command : “ Loose him, and let him go.”

And thus again we learn how Jesus takes man into partnership with Himself, even in His mightiest works. That which man can do, whether it be the rolling away the stone, or the loosing of the grave-clothes, this He bids him do.

But another lesson we may learn. Put off the grave-clothes of a death in sin ! Let not old habits, the world’s maxims, the besetting sin of former days, impede and keep in bondage the soul which Christ hath quickened by His Spirit. Put off all that tells of the unconverted life. Put on all that befits one raised to so high a position. “ Mortify, therefore, your members which are on the

earth." "Set your affections on things above." Watch over the rebellious will. Guard well the unruly tongue. Curb the rash or sullen temper. Lay aside all "filthiness of the flesh and spirit," and "perfect holiness in the fear of God."

Let the closing thought on this part of the narrative be to remind us of that all-powerful voice which in a moment could thus summon the dead to life.

I hear the voice of the Son of man thus reviving dead and buried hopes.

You may have had a hope, a longing, in days that are past ; but, in the providence of God, it would seem as if the desire were denied thee. Perhaps it may be. We must bend our will to God's will. We must bring our requests to God, and then leave Him to do what seemeth best.

"Hast thou a hope for which thy heart
Would almost count it death to part ?
Ask thou thy God that hope to crown,
Or give thee strength to lay it down."

But, perhaps, after all, in some shape, the blessing may be granted. You may have lived and died without any apparent sign of your prayer being heard; and then, on another shore, those for whom you have long prayed may greet you as the appointed means of their salvation. Or it may be that some gift, which you have sought and prayed for in vain on earth, may then in a far higher degree be conferred upon you.

But I hear also the voice of Jesus summoning from the grave those long sleeping in the dust.

It was a "loud" voice in which Jesus spake to Lazarus; but what a voice will that be that shall sound in every grave, yea, in the depths of the sea, and shall call forth the dead. "The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." Great the joy of the

risen saints, when, at the day of Christ's coming, they awake to receive in the body the recompense for toil and suffering. Pardoned through the atoning blood, accepted through the perfect righteousness of Christ ; nevertheless, every prayer and labour and effort shall be rewarded through the same mercy and grace which has wrought all their works in them. Great, too, the woe of those who shall then stand before the throne unsaved, and whose evil deeds shall then be brought to light. Never have I read any incident that reminds me so forcibly of this, as the story of Macaba, the African chief, who was notorious for his wars and cruelties, and who was present on one occasion when Mr. Moffatt was preaching on the Resurrection.

“What!” said he, starting with surprise ; “what are those words about the dead ? The dead arise !”

“Yes : all the dead will arise.”

“Will my father arise ?”

“Yes.”

“Will all the slain in battle arise?”

“Yes.”

“Will all that have been killed and eaten by lions, tigers, and crocodiles, arise?”

“Yes: and come to judgment.”

“Hark!” shouted the chief, turning to the warriors; “ye wise men, did your ears ever hear such strange and unheard-of news? Did you,” turning to an old man, the wise man of his tribe; “did you ever hear such news as this?”

“Never,” answered the old man.

The chief then turned to the missionary, and said,—

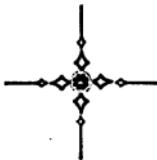
“Father, I love you much; but the words of the Resurrection are too great for me. I do not wish to hear about the dead rising again. The dead cannot rise: the dead shall not rise.”

“Tell me, my friend, why not?” said the missionary.

“I have slain my thousands: shall they arise?”

The thought completely overwhelmed him.
How dare he meet those whom he had
injured or slain?

Oh, that on that great day every reader of
these pages may arise in the likeness of Christ,
to share His kingdom and glory.



VIL.

THE FAMILY RE-UNITED.

 It is scarcely possible to realize the joy of the sisters in the restoration of Lazarus.

The bond of Christian love which before had linked them together, had been drawn far tighter. Their new joy was the gift of their Saviour, and endeared them the more to each other and to Him. How clearly could they now trace His dealings with them ; the long delay, the painful separation, the days of bitter grief and sorrow. How truly would they praise Him for His faithful love, and wonder that they could ever have distrusted Him even for a moment.

It is well for us to remember that many such glad surprises will greet Christians hereafter. Perhaps to the very close of life's pilgrimage the path may be dark and gloomy ; but when the river has been crossed, and

Christ's glory revealed, hopes long crushed will revive, one and another once dead in sin will be found to have been quickened in answer to believing prayer; families all one in Christ's everlasting kingdom, where on earth there had been a stray sheep, plucked perchance by the Good Shepherd from the very brink of destruction.

Before leaving our subject, we will trace the immediate results that followed the raising of Lazarus.

The glory of God was manifested through this miracle, *in that it was the means of bringing salvation to some who were perishing.* "Many of the Jews that came to Mary and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on Him."

It is very probable that with some of these Jews, their faith was only of a very imperfect and temporary character. They saw this mighty work, and were led for a season to number themselves amongst His disciples. But with some it was more lasting. Even when some time had passed, we read that by

reason of Lazarus many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus. No doubt this miracle was the glass in which many saw, as they had not seen before, the glory of Christ. They beheld in Him something of the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, and trusted in His great salvation.

But side by side with this, the glory of Christ in this miracle *manifested the utter callousness, the hardness, and the unbelief of others amongst the bystanders, and of the chief priests and Pharisees.* In the Parable of the Beggar and the Rich Man, Christ has declared that "if men believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." In the narrative we are considering, we see the truth of this saying. For some of those present, in their determined hostility to Christ, went and told the Pharisees of the miracle, and this excited their anger against Him. More than this; we read of the Pharisees holding a council together, and

purposing to put to death the One who had just shown Himself to be the Prince and Giver of life! More than this; a plot is made also to put Lazarus to death, because men saw in him the proof of Christ's Divine power! Is it possible for unbelief to go beyond this? Had they reflected but a moment, they might have seen clearly that they were fighting against God, and must bring down His sore judgments upon their heads.

Thus we find the work of Christ brought salvation to some, but became a stumbling-block and rock of offence to others. It took from them all excuse. It made them tenfold more guilty in their rejection of Him. And thus also is it with the Gospel itself, and the knowledge of Christ revealed in the Word. It is the savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. "Everything is a two-edged sword. All Christian privileges, all means of grace, Scriptures, Sermons, Sacraments, Sundays, Churches, Chapels, Liturgies, and

all things that Christ's ministers do and teach in His Name, are, according as they are used, either blessings or banes, either physic or poison ; they are either for weal or woe, either an odour of life unto life eternal, or of death unto death eternal, to the souls of all to whom they come."

Dear reader, I would very earnestly and affectionately entreat you to consider the effect upon yourself of the blessed Gospel of the grace of God. You did not indeed stand by the grave of Bethany ; but in reading these pages you have been dwelling in thought upon the Saviour's grace and power as there displayed.

You have known, moreover, of the glorious Resurrection of Christ Himself. No event can be more sure when you consider the number and fidelity of the witnesses, and the result that followed in the growth of the Christian Church. You have also the gracious promises and free invitations of the Saviour. You have the offered grace of the

Holy Ghost, the Comforter ; and the example of multitudes who have found in Christ the resting-place and salvation of their souls. You have the message declared to you by the ambassadors of Christ, that there is for you an immediate reconciliation with God, through the perfect sacrifice of Calvary, if you but humble yourself for your sin and rely solely on the blood of the Cross.

Do you heartily embrace the offer of salvation ? Do you accept the gift of life eternal ? Do you recognise your own lost condition, and turn in confiding hope to Him who can restore and save you ? What is the answer of your heart to the voice of a pleading Saviour ? Is it something of this kind— “No ! I care neither for Christ nor His gifts. Give me more of the world’s treasures, or comforts, and I will thank you. Give me rest, and ease, and pleasure, and health ; but as for the mercy and grace of Christ I need it not : I ask it not ” ? Or is your reply the very reverse of this— “ Yea, Lord, with

all my heart I embrace the hope Thy Word affords ! Give me Thyself, Thy peace, Thy love, Thy salvation ! Without Thee I perish and am undone, but I cast myself on Thy free and unmerited bounty. I look to Thee to cleanse me and renew me,—to save and bless me evermore"?

Which is the answer that your heart gives ? Christ's hand is stretched out. Do you accept it by faith or reject it by your unbelief ?

None can fully describe the solemn importance of the question : DOST THOU BELIEVE ON THE SON OF GOD ? It is a matter of life and death.

A ship is in a fearful storm. The timbers are creaking, the mast is gone, the waves are dashing over the bulwarks. A passenger with wife and children and all that he has, is on board. "Can she live through the storm ?" is the anxious question he puts.

A prisoner is being tried for his life. The jury are consulting together. The question is put to the foreman : Guilty, or not guilty ?

How solemn is the issue which hangs upon the answer!

But neither of these questions is so important to those concerned in them as is the answer to the question I have proposed to yourself. Unless thou hast true faith in Christ, how canst thou meet the storms that will arise? What wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan? What wilt thou do when the Lord shall arise to shake terribly the earth, and when His judgments overtake His enemies? What wilt thou do before the great white throne, when every vain excuse will be exposed, and every sin laid bare before the eye of thy Judge? Ah, hasten to thy Saviour, delay not a moment! How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?

But another result that followed this mighty work was *the quickened zeal and devotion of Mary.*

The last glimpse we have of the family of Bethany is in the house of Simon the leper.

Once more we see Mary at the Saviour's footstool, for she brings a box of precious ointment and anoints both the head and feet of Jesus. Though Judas and others blamed her, yet Jesus commends her, and leaves her as a pattern to His people wheresoever His Gospel is preached.

Dear reader, if Christ hath done a great work for thee, if He hath quickened thy soul from a death of sin, if He hath heard thy prayer and made thee to know His great love to thee, then follow in the footsteps of this godly woman.

Give to Him thy best. Give to Him thyself, thy heart, thy life, thy all. Give that which thou wouldest naturally like to expend on thyself. Give money, time, labour, in His service. Give ungrudgingly. It is a very easy thing to find excellent reasons against giving for any object whatever. There are always defects in what man does, so that if we wait to find perfection in any scheme or society or work, we shall fold our hands and

never give or do anything. But the heart that loves Christ is skilful in discovering reasons why money should be given and help rendered where His work may be advanced and forwarded.

Give too thy prayers and praises. Anoint thus the exalted Head of the Church. Let many petitions be presented for the purity and increase of His Church on earth.

And look forward to His own acceptance and approval of thy work. He will soon be here, and thou shalt rejoice in His word of welcome,—

“Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”



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